

This, That and Something Else

Book II

Whimsical thoughts that will resonate in your heart

By

Purnima L. Toolsidass

God's Secret Army.

It is considered odd these days, if anybody uses the word 'God'.
'What's God? Who's God? What proof is there, that there is a God?'
A fusillade of such objections has to be faced whenever I speak of God in young company.

Well, I am an old woman. I am old fashioned, and not afraid to say what I believe in. You can accuse me of having old-fashioned beliefs, but I believe that there is an unseen power, that has universal benevolence, is compassionate and just, and is all-knowing and full of unconditional love. If nobody can prove the existence of this power, nobody can disprove it either. It is a matter of belief, and belief is not something that can be measured by instruments, no matter how sophisticated and sensitive new methods of research may be. Machines can only measure things that have tangible substance, or a vacuum. I believe God abides in all beings and can only be known by faith and love, if the person is pure-hearted and has universal benevolence.

Now, go ahead and laugh, if you want. You can't stop me from believing in Him, and feeling happy to have Him in my heart!
Yes! I see that benevolent Almighty as Him, but actually, I believe that His is a power, without form or gender. I find it easier to focus on that power which I can't see – I like to call him 'Krishna', but I fully concur with Shakespeare's opinion about 'a rose by any other name.....'

You will be wondering when I will come to topic of this article about God's secret army. You may accuse me of being illogical, because the word army indicates a large group of people who are violent and oppressive, and God represents compassion, mercy and love. Our perception is based on the rulers in history who have used their might to attack and conquer other Kingdoms.

Actually, that also applied to what I term as God's secret army. It is secret because the media takes no interest in the gentle activities of this huge group of people. They find it more profitable to sensationalise the armies who promote violence and mass slaughter. For that, I am afraid it is we – the readers – who are partly responsible, because our eyes and ears go straight to reports of warfare, brutality and criminal activities. Who wants to read of activities like M. Teresa or the Dalai Lama? Would Mala have had any mention in the media had she not been shot at for defying the ban of education for girls? Would anyone have heard of Greta Thunberg had she not become a serious threat for all the big-money industries that harm the environment?

God's secret army is not heard of, either, because the great and little things people do, to reduce the suffering of this world cannot be called sensational news; nobody will even want to read about those who find time to help another even when they are worked off their feet. The old woman who comforts a neighbour's sick child, a little girl who shares her nightly cup of milk with the kitten she has found, a mother who is so tired that she can hardly keep her eyes open, heating up the food for her equally tired husband who had to stay back late at work, a wounded soldier who hides his own pain to say words of cheer to the soldier on the next bed, who is in worse pain than he is – and oh! A hundred other such selfless people who don't think there is anything noble in what they do!

The secret army of do-gooders is too vast to be enumerated. If you keep your eyes open you will see them all round, everywhere. They come in all ages, all colours, all shapes, all sizes and all forms. They include the teachers who care about their students – something that is worth far beyond the highest stipend. They include doctors and nurses, staff members, street walkers, pavement dwellers, liftmen, bell-boys, bus conductors, delivery men, ticket masters on the train,

porters, barbers, hairdressers, taxi drivers, clerks, air hostesses, tea stall owners, temple priests, and others from all walks of life.

They have one thing in common, by which they are recognized at once. They are soft spoken and have gentle eyes. They arouse a feeling of goodwill and you feel comforted by their smile. Their smile is not just a movement of the lips that belies the calculation in the eyes; it is a wave of benevolence that makes you feel better no matter how low you were feeling when you encountered them. They will certainly not take it as an insult when I say that they uplift our spirits the way the adoring look in our dog's eye does.

Why is that?

It is because they seem to be 'on my side'. As we grow from childhood to adulthood we begin to understand that the world can be very hostile and very hurtful. We feel we are floundering in a sea with sharks and other dangerous sea creatures, and God's army is like the dolphins that protect us from being preyed upon.

And, what does this army do? It gives comfort, it gives hope, it gives love and it makes the world worth living in. It reiterated out faith in humanity and humane values. It teaches us that there are people who are almost angelic in their intentions even if they scold us and bully us for our own good. These people cannot be bought by wealth or fame or other worldly rewards; they have an inner richness that makes a mockery of worldly wealth. They become richer with every gesture or effort to give goodwill and comfort, because God's banking system is unique – He gives compound interest in happiness and satisfaction that no earthly bank can afford, even if they were inclined. So, the more they give, the richer they become.

What payment do they receive? Their payment is no sent directly to any famous or infamous bank in this world. The riches they gather fill the coffers of their heart and are given – freely, unstintingly and lavishly – on whoever they meet or see. You will notice it in the face

of a fellow-traveller on the tube, or walking beside you on the pavement, or standing in the queue for a cinema ticket. How do you recognize them?

They are as easy to recognize as the Nazis who wore a grim, forbidding expression to put the fear of God into the countries they overran. Only, the people of God's secret army look as happy and friendly as a Labrador puppy most of the time! They seem to smile at you even if they are frowning over some dilemma of their own; probably about what more they can do to brighten the day of a colleague who faces some serious setback in life.

And, who do the soldiers of God's army fight? They put up a jolly good fight against everything Voldimore stood for! For those who have not experienced the delights and suspense of the Harry Potter series written by J. K. Rowling, suffice it that what they do is like guerrilla warfare against every negative trend in the world. If you are feeling let down by a friend, they make you feel that there are also people in this world who are helpful and friendly without having any vested interest. If you feel life is not worth living because your partner has left you for someone else, they make you feel that there is much good you can do with your life, if you just give it a little thought. If you have lost most of your savings in a share market drop, they give you the hope that money can be earned again; there is no reason to consider it a permanent tragedy. And, if you are grieving over the death of your dog, they make you feel he is happy and free of his pain now, in a land where there is no sorrow, and where he waits to meet you again.

Thus, this silent army is busy defeating everything that the Devil has created to destroy peace and goodness. It is like Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent struggle against the oppression of the mighty Rule Britannia – a Kingdom where the sun never set. It seems an unequal battle, but we have seen that ultimately good overcomes evil. Not all the forces of evil can destroy this silent army of God, if we don't smother the little voice of God in us – the voice of our conscience.

But, if you ask any of these people about it, they will say, 'oh, I'm a very ordinary person; I just do what I can.' This is in sharp contrast to people who make a great display of their virtues and good deeds, most of which are done with some personal consideration in mind!

Now, it is up to each one of us to decide which force we are with. And, we have to remember that we can fool others, we can even fool ourselves, but we can't fool the voice of truth within, and no amount of cleverness can replace the authentic goodness and humility of a true soldier of the army of God!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

23rd October, 2024

The Problem with People is that they.....

- Never seem to do what I suggest
- Always want me to do things for them
- Take offence at the drop of a hat
- Seem to have no sense of humour
- Want to talk about their problems but not listen to mine
- Misunderstand me and say I am unreasonable
- Order the most expensive dishes when it's my turn to pay
- Don't laugh at my jokes but expect me to laugh at theirs
- Praise their children and point out the faults in mine
- Always have a witty retort when I say something they don't like
- Want to chat when I'm reading a most exciting book
- Go for holidays to the places I've always wanted to go to
- Get such good bargains
- Never seem to be free when I want their help
- Don't seem to care about dogs
- Either have too much money or too little
- Somehow manage to find something to criticize
- Always see the worst in others
- Always show how superior they are
- Always hear the news before I do
- Are much more self-confident than me
- Always have a more interesting story to cap the one I talk about
- Phone just when I start shampooing my hair
- Forget about returning a book they borrow
- Never come on time
- Always remember the help they gave me but never the help I gave them
- Are so full of solicited advice
- Arrive when I'm busy but never come when I want them to come

Purnima L. Toolsidass

21st September, '24

DO NOT DISTURB.

‘What a lot of rubbish you gather’, grumbled my daughter as she helped me sort of a drawer full of old papers. As old age catches up I find I need help in doing the smallest tasks - a real let down to my pride in ‘not being dependant’ all these years.

‘What have you found?’ I asked eagerly. I love reading old letters. ‘This,’ she said. It was a ‘Do Not Disturb’ sticker the airlines used to give when we travelled abroad. I don’t know if they still give one, but it was so pretty, with a bright red background and the letters in black bold capitals. We old people tend to slip into memories that irritate youngsters who want to get on with it, because they have so many other things to deal with. Understanding Reena’s impatience I hurriedly put aside the sticker and turned to other papers.

Later, I fingered it again, thinking of how nice it would be if we could put up a mental sticker to stop disturbing thoughts and memories. Old people don’t want to ‘not be disturbed’; they are lonely and long for someone to come and ‘disturb’ them with idle chitchat, grandchildren grumbling about their parents not letting them go out to late-night parties or buy the latest shockingly expensive shoes, or a servant opening her heart about her personal problems. We oldies get bored with the TV and with our memories and it helps us to not think of the things we loved to do and can do no more.

As a child I’d vowed to not become like old people when I grew old. I vowed I would never bore my visitors with reminiscences after reading this little verse - I’m sure you’ll enjoy it as much as I did, and still do:

The songs my mother taught me, I love to sing again.

Historical places revisited occasion no disdain.

I confess I have a fondness for old china, letters and folks -

A fondness that does not extend to old familiar jokes!

However, what does an oldie like me do, when we no longer have the energy or the urge to go out or participate in the activities that once kept us busy. I, for one, don’t enjoy watching the TV - don’t be shocked, but I don’t even like the movies on Netflix! My children tell me I’m unnatural - I dislike gossip intensely! I love reading and music, but my eyes get tired and the music doesn’t hold my attention after a while.

Result? The active brain goes into the past, leaving me with a feeling of nostalgia. Another quote from my old diary of quotations: 'yesterday's joy is no longer joy, but yesterday's sorrow is sorrow still.'

That brings me back to 'Do Not Disturb'. Old as I am, I love movies like 'Mary Poppins' and 'Peter Pan' and 'The Sound of Music' and 'My Fair Lady'! They had a magic that I believe we all need, no matter how old we get.

You will surely laugh when you read this, but I feel that the present generation is in danger of becoming too pragmatic and too focused on the immediate and too determined to establish their individuality. It seems to me that this is being very childish - are they trying to prove to themselves that they are now grown up? Is this their way of asserting their independent thought by refuting and rebelling? I wonder if they've every analyzed why they feel impelled to substitute the old-fashioned word 'God' for 'the Universe'?

I suppose the so-called 'men of God' have brought about this aversion to the name of God, because to their minds, to admit the possibility of a benevolent power is like condoning the countless wrongs done by people who claim to be believers.

Nobody can deny the existence of hypocrisy in people - believers and non-believers alike. Well - why blame poor God for this very human frailty? Blame man's super-smart intellect that is so quick to find justification for every kind of wrong-doing! We call ourselves human beings, even though our behavior is of often downright inhuman! We call ourselves the most developed of all species, but behave worse than any animal, and the psychologists excuse it as the work of a disturbed mind.

Can AI find a way to implant a 'Do Not Disturb' in the human brain? This would be wonderful, because man is the only animal that needs such a restriction; else, God knows what kind of a monster man may become, the way violence, brutality and hatred seem to be overcoming the whole world!

Now, just imagine - if a brain implant of 'Do Not Disturb' could be implanted successfully, people would become free of all disturbing thoughts. The first to go would be fear, I think. The next would be anger or perhaps the next one would be greed. What do you think - is greed more disturbing than anger, or is anger the more disturbing? Of course, there is a long list of disturbing thoughts that spiritual seekers and philosophers have tried to overcome since eons of

time. Jealousy, lust, vanity, arrogance, cruelty, the urge to dictate, rule and dominate, the urge to possess and the happier urges to love, give, help and be kind. These latter don't disturb - they soothe; but nobody seems to recognize this or try to develop these soothing, enriching and happiness-giving inclinations.

So maybe, instead of a 'Do Not Disturb' implant, we should ask the scientists to develop a 'Right-thinking' implant? Here again, comes the dilemma of what 'right thinking' is! The Israelites think killing Palestinians is 'right thinking', and the Palestinians think killing Jews is 'right thinking'. Those who take drugs swear that this is the only thing living for and dying for, while a soldier feels that his Nation is more precious than his life. Animal lovers don't care what happens to humans but there are 'humanists' who feel animals don't matter. Greta Thunberg suffers all kinds of indignities and hardship to save our future generation from environmental disaster, but the world's most powerful and advanced countries compete to find newer ways for mass destruction. Who are you and I to judge whether it is 'right thinking' to kill and destroy and be cruel, or whether it is 'right thinking' to make our own individual contribution to minimizing the damage we do to our environment and spread compassion whenever possible?

And, if your brain is reeling with all these dilemmas, I suggest you put up a mental 'Do Not Disturb' sign on to your mind and forget about everything, because nothing makes sense in the long run! But if your interest is aroused and you want to make your life worthwhile, you can do what I've done. I've decided not to waste my time with all the confusion created by different opinions and place my faith in the good old values I learnt at my grandfather's knee - honesty, kindness, helpfulness, truthfulness, compassion, sincerity, hard work, clean fun and goodwill for all. And I dare anybody's philosophy to fault that!!

But, whatever we do, it is well to remember that just as we don't want anyone to disturb us, we need to be careful to not disturb others - live and let live isn't a bad motto, is it?

Purnima L. Toolsidass
May, 2024

For the Participants of Formula 1 of Life.

Youngsters who want to make something of their lives can think over these tips.

- Nobody can be happy unless they are loved. Happiness being the primary goal of life, one needs to get love; and the only way to get love is to give love and be pleasant. The race is meaningless without love.
- The mind is restless and fickle. It is like grit that gets into the fuel. It becomes an obstruction in progress of any kind. Only those who learn how to concentrate can harness their skills and energy to race ahead in life. Keep your fuel free of all dirt.
- Misunderstandings block mental peace. Mental peace is essential for progress. The way to avoid misunderstandings is to put yourself in the position of the other and behave with them as you'd want them to behave with you. This is the best way to avert accidents.
- Money becomes useless if you lose the capacity to enjoy the things it can procure, so cherish and protect good health – mental as well as physical! It is the lubricant that only fools waste. After all, how could you be in the race if your vehicle was unfit?
- Time is a very precious commodity. Invest it like a tycoon invests his wealth. The important thing in this race is to see how many laps you can complete before the race ends. Allowing time to be frittered away makes you poor and unhappy in the long run. Remember the race of the hare and the tortoise?
- Allowing yourself to get misguided by 'good timers' is unforgivable folly. Keep a sharp lookout for the signposts that warn you of dangerous curves.
- Set-backs are stepping stones and god luck is a helping hand. The race would be no fun if it was just smooth sailing. It's just a matter of changing gear intelligently.
- Letting success go to your head is to forget to use the brake. Then, the race will be lost before you've got going.
- Keep the engine of your mind-body in high-performance level, but don't ruin it by letting it get over-heated or run down.
- Life has rules, just like traffic rules. Ignore them at your peril. Don't grumble about the bumps you've forgotten to slow down for.
- The winning post is not fixed; the winner is the one who puts in his best effort, drives like a gentleman and achieves the optimum benefit of the vehicle he is driving.

- This race laps, and those who can take the bad patches lightly and coast over the good patches at a steady progress are the model drivers.
- The prize of winning the Formula 1 of life is to win the respect, affection and admiration of whoever you encounter during the race. You become a role model for the future participants of this race.
- The losers in this race are those who retire from the running.
- Keep an eye on the rear window, yes, but looking ahead is more important.
- Make sure your windscreen wipers are in good order else a sudden downpour of emotion may lead to a crash.
- Choose your co-passenger with the utmost care; you can never give your best if your companion is not compatible.
- Be extra careful when changing direction. Keep your steering wheel well lubricated with the ability to take quick decisions that are wise.
- Give clear signals to be safe and keep others safe. Communication skills can't be overrated. This way, you don't get abused, and the fear of losing your temper – and judgment – is avoided.
- Headlights are needed in the dark; wisdom is needed for navigating in the unknown.
- Balance is the crux, no matter what you do or where you are, or what your vehicle is like. If you don't have it you get upturned.
- Extreme care is required to read the signs on the route; they flash by so fast that you can have a bad mishap if you miss the sign of a bump or barrier ahead.
- A champion driver needs to restrict his speech. Talking too much will land him into trouble. He needs to listen and be alert to what is happening round him.
- Winners of Formula 1 of Life give profound thought to their journey when they embark on it. They plan the route they want to take, the likely and possible obstacles and slippery portions they will have to traverse, and be prepared for the unexpected. The art of remaining calm in a crisis is essential.
- Being alert about the petrol gauge prevents being disqualified due to an empty petrol tank. This race can't be run without the petrol of idealism and optimism.
- Lubrication is important; so is intermittent relaxation.
- Understanding is the machine grease that keeps everything functioning and the engine purring.
- Do not enter for this race unless you are equipped for it. It needs guts, hope, determination, wisdom, conviction, compassion, intelligence, idealism and optimism. Good luck follows, but the good news is that every person who joins feels a tremendous self-respect, no matter how he fares in the race.

- The track you drive on is full of pitfalls, so only a fool would neglect to ensure that his brakes are in top working order and that he doesn't lose control.
- The car runs on four wheels and the air in each must be perfect to avoid a crash or loss of speed. The four tires are faith, determination, endurance and an open mind; and universal goodwill is the air that helps smooth the bumps on the journey.
- Compassion and understanding, sympathy and empathy are an EV you can avail of, to keep the air clear of ill-will, doubt, and avarice.
- And, last but not the least; you must decide which track you want to go on. Track A is for those who want to do the work and Track B is for those who want to take the credit. As one wise father advised his son, 'take Track A there's less competition'!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

31st March, 2024.

Independence or Slavery?

As a teenager, I want to assert myself. I want to be treated like an adult, and not be told what to do and what not to do, how to dress and what not to wear, when I should go to sleep and by what time I have to come home, and so many other admonitions that I'm fed up of hearing!

Like any teenager, I rebelled. I was rude, and when that failed to stop my mother from treating me like a child, I became more rude. I became disobedient and told her to her face that I would do exactly as I liked and the more she told me the worse I'd get! Then I walked off because I didn't want to see her distress or listen to another lecture.

Rohit was on the comp when I reached his house. He looked unusually serious. I asked him what was bothering him. 'Nothing,' he said. 'Just something I saw on the U-tube.'

'Let's see,' I said, and he clicked on replay.

It was not a long message. The speaker looked cool – I can't remember who he was, but what he said sure made us think. He was talking about how teenagers need to assert their independence but in doing so, become slaves. Not slaves to another person, but slaves because they are helpless in controlling their anger, insecurity, desire for thrills, the compulsion to show off, and so many other things that don't really make us feel happy after the first impulse is met.

The guy said that our reactions reveal our weaknesses, and instead of behaving like adults, we behave like brats and that hurts our own self-image and adds to our frustration. He said that rudeness is a sign of weakness, anger a sign of frustration, and doing things to shock people is a sign of immaturity.

These are pretty strong words. I am shaken by them. I don't want to believe them, but I can't dismiss them as untrue.

It's true – I can't control my behavior. I don't know what to do. I don't want to be a slave to my mixed-up feelings I want to behave like a sophisticated man of the world and treated with respect. But, who will teach me how?

I guess I'll just have to observe myself, and others, and teach myself, if I really want to be free of the slavery of peer pressure and tutored attitudes!

Purnima L. Toolsidas

March 2019

Modern physics/science: Ancient Indian books.

Our ancient books speak about 'metaphysical' things that I feel modern science will find interesting. I believe many of them already correspond to what has been discovered, and many will gradually be proved in time.

Most of our ancient Indian writings are considered to be 5,000 years old or older. Civilization was undoubtedly highly developed, but there seems little detail about science as we know it. It is possible that this lack of mention is because the emphasis was on the spiritual rather than the material; or because the common people would hardly understand the scientific reasoning. In fact, I had once asked a Shastriji as to some of our customs – like why dogs are considered untouchable and why we have to live like untouchables at the birth of baby or someone's death. He explained that the not touching people was a method of quarantine and dogs foraged in garbage dumps, so there was a risk of their carrying infections into the house. He said that religious taboos were created for the sake of health and hygiene of common people.

However, I have read of many things that cannot be explained by the understanding developed by observation and introspection. For example, the Spanda Tattva. Spanda means a vibration or pulsation. Tattva means a basic element. According to this principle, the substratum of all creation is the Spanda Tattva that is the substratum of all creation on which everything is superimposed as a temporary existence, like a wave on the surface of the sea.

The Spanda Tattva and the non-dual Brahman that has no form and no attribute are synonyms. Sacchidananda is another name for the same Tattva. Sat = pure existence, Chit = pure consciousness, and Anand = pure bliss – this is the composition of the Spanda Tattva in its pristine form. When the supreme pristine consciousness-existence-bliss wants to manifest it vibrates, and duality is created, because there can be no creation without duality.

Sound is also a vibration. Sound waves are used at different levels for different purposes. Music is shown to be effective in influencing

moods and states of mind. Our ancient seers used mantras that are believed to activate the elements and the nervous system, even bring people out of a coma and reactivate nerves rendered inactive by paralysis. Mantras were used to activate weapons that used fire and other elements, brought light or darkness, and different illusions.

The index finger and the little finger are said to have negative a current. A person doing the mala (prayer beads) is supposed to use only the thumb, second and third fingers, because they have positive current. How did the ancient seers obtain this knowledge without the help of sophisticated instruments?

The Yoga Darshan explains that there are three main channels of subtle energy – the central channel called the Sushumna, and the Ida on its left and the Pingla on its right. These were not found in surgery, but when kinetic photography was discovered, it showed these channels that run along the spine. This subtle energy is called the Serpent Power in the books on Tantra. The Sanskrit name for it is the Kundalini Shakti. It is coiled like a snake, at the base of the spine. Specific and meticulous methods are given in our ancient books as how this can be activated and the supernatural powers it can give. This Kundalini Shakti rises from the lowest Chakra (centre of subtle energy) and pierces the next six Chakras till it comes to the seventh Chakra – the Sahasrara Chakra that is at the crown of the head. The supernatural powers that can be obtained by this have been seen and recorded times and again. But, how did the ancients learn about this subtle energy and how it can be tapped.

The Bhagwat Mahapurana describes the development of a fetus from day one, one week, one month, three months, and so on, up to the birth. It describes the effects of external stimuli, the emotions, thoughts, food, drink and activities of the pregnant mother on her unborn baby. It describes the effect of mantras spoken when the baby is conceived, developing, at the time of birth and a few days old. Isn't that incredible?

How did the seers get such detailed knowledge about the geography of the oceans, mountains and continents? About astronomy and astrology? How could they predict a child's future and nature,

eclipses, prosperity, famine, periods of peace and prosperity and periods of war and famine?

The plants and other ingredients used in Ayur Veda are amazing. Experts could diagnose the illness by just taking the pulse of the person. The wearing of certain stones to counter the unfavorable effects of planets is something modern science has yet to fathom; and it is not entirely due to superstition that some people get immediate 'bad luck' if they wear a stone like the sapphire even today.

The Ashok Chakra is a pillar built over 2,000 years ago. Even today, metallurgists are baffled about what metals and process were used to create it. It has neither rusted nor eroded in any way.

How did the ancients know that all matter is composed of the five elements – earth, water, fire, air and space? How did they know the characteristic of each of these five elements, or the different Yagnas that use different mantras, procedures, ingredients that are used in the offerings in the sacred fire? Even today there are people who can successfully do a Yagna for benefits like getting a child, getting a good spouse, winning a court case, getting wealth, increasing longevity and harming an enemy.

Five kinds of wind are described inside the human body; prana, samana, udana, vyana and apana. Their respective functions and movements are described in our ancient books.

Our ancient books separate the Satya from the asatya. Satya is an eternal substance that can never be negated, whereas asatya is something that has a temporary existence, a beginning and an end. Satya always IS. It has neither a beginning nor an end.

Consciousness is also separated. There is the pure consciousness – the Chit, or the Chaitanya – that is not corrupted by subjective considerations. There is the chetan that is present in the sentient and absent in the insentient living beings and objects. The body is inert matter. It can feel and react, but it is the brain that analyses and plans, not the body. The nervous system of all beings has these in common – pain, fear, fatigue, hunger, and desire.

The subtle body is called the antahkarana. Antah means inner and karan means instrument. It is the fourfold mind composed of the

mana = emotional mind, buddhi = intellect, chitta = thoughts or state of mind, and ahankara = the subtle pride of individuality. It is the subtle body that governs the gross body.

Then there is the Atma (Soul is not an appropriate translation) that is not separate from the non-dual Brahman which has no form and no attributes, and is the substratum of everything that exists. The Atma that is attached to a body is called a jeeva-atma. The purpose of human birth is to purify the antahkarana until the person realizes that he/she is not the body, nor the mind. He/she is the Atma that is not separate from the Brahman, and the person feels he/she is everyone and all things; that the experiences of the body are not connected to the Atma. It is not a state of Samadhi, because a Samadhi is not permanent. This is enlightenment. It is Gnan. Once achieved it remains all through life and beyond.

The ancient books also explain how Time and Space are imagined. To measure the beginning of Time is not possible. The past and the future are transient, because the past turns into the present so fast that it cannot be measured. Space, too, is imagined and immeasurable. Isn't it remarkable that the seers could find and reason all this with no sophisticated instruments?

The Atma is the only non-dual eternal Truth. When this consciousness that is intrinsically joy and pure existence wishes to frolic by creating duality, it uses its shakti – its power, force, energy – whatever name you wish to give – to create universal intelligence, the five subtle forms of matter the five elements, and then everything the universe is made of.

Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychologist who was a contemporary of Freud, proved a phenomenon called 'the collective unconscious', which is a kind of sphere where all thoughts and words every spoken or thought are stored, and anyone with the requisite ability can tap into them. This seems to confirm the Vedic principle that all beings are connected at one level. The law of karma seems to coincide with Newton's law of every action has its equal and opposite reaction. There have been any number of past life experiences which have not

been explained by science or logic, strengthening the belief that the Atma does not perish with the body.

Another interesting fact is that the Rishis did japa (chant one name or mantra (several times) and did meditation sitting on a deerskin or tiger skin. These were only for helping sadhana, not for eating, or sitting casually, or sleeping on. The purpose was to ensure that the inner power generated by their internal efforts would not go downwards; that it would go to a higher level. How did they know these things?

This is all I can think of at present. Hope you didn't find it boring!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

May 2022

Have you ever noticed how.....

- Some people's eyes smile even when they don't.
- Busy people are never too busy to tell you how busy they are.
- We love to eat puchkas even though we cry while eating them.
- Doctors never seem to do the things they tell us to do
- Teachers never like their mistake to be pointed out.
- Little children know how to take every fall in their stride and smile again.
- Dogs teach us how to not bear grudges.
- Promises made before the wedding are forgotten as soon as the wedding is over.
- Religious preachers preach humility but seldom practice it.
- Your problem is inevitably less serious than the problem of the person you confide in.
- Kind people are always happier and more popular than clever people.
- Great disappointed can be avoided by not having high hopes.
- People who believe in talking frankly don't like it when others are frank.
- Wealthy people and celebrities consider themselves to be exempt from good manners.
- Not even the grumpiest person in the world can help smiling when his dog comes running to greet him.
- You feel happy as soon as you do something good.

BREATHE SMART

An item in today's Times of India (e-paper) caught my eye. It was about Shri Shri Ravi Shankar, founder of the Art of Living Foundation meeting Mr. Bjarni Benediktsson, the Prime Minister of Iceland on the 24th of June this year.

The article was brief but interesting. The focus of the discussion was mental health. That included individual well-being, overcoming tension, stress, anxiety, and physical and mental well-being.

It also mentioned the Art of Living's program in Denmark, to rehabilitate prisoners and gang members, reducing the cycle of violence and drug addiction. This program is called 'Breathe Smart' - a catchy title that no doubt includes the scientific breath-control exercises given in Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga.

Later on in the day, my mind went back to what I'd read. Pride for our ancient knowledge and wisdom battled with sadness that whereas advanced countries like Iceland and Denmark have realized the needs and benefits for such programs, we in the country of their origin hanker for hedonism, ruining both mental and physical health and becoming prey to all that we see as bad and wrong in the trend of the more affluent nations.

It is sad that our so-called intellectuals rant and rave over petty political issues, ignoring the things that really matter in the long run. What does it matter, which leader said what and accused whom of whichever misdeed they think is of the utmost importance? Are any of these of greater importance than the mental and physical health of our future generations? They, who should be the first to prioritize what is most important for a country and its people are actually sending signals to the young adults that petty scrabbling of a few is more important than long term welfare of the whole; and the saddest part of it is that even highly acclaimed educationalists don't seem to notice what is happening.

This is where I raise my proverbial hat to the unceasing effort of SERVE, to reduce the stress for children and help them understand the importance of values. Children look up to their teachers and parents. Their minds absorb all they see and hear unconsciously, and these subtle subconscious impressions mould their behavior and attitudes as adults - married or unmarried, their work and values, their political and humanitarian leanings, and their composite lives. Serve gives the right inputs.

That being the case, let us see where the advanced countries went wrong. I am very likely to be mistaken because I am not a Professor with a long list of degrees

behind my name, but I see no reason why the most humble of us can't use common sense and do a spot of independent thinking! We are individuals, and our world-view is our own, and we owe it to ourselves to discern intellectually and listen to the inner voice which needs no academic degrees to tell us simple truths!

It seems to me that when the advanced countries developed science, and inventions made life easier, people had more time to relax and enjoy themselves. Every being wants ease, comfort and pleasure - nothing wrong in that; but too much of anything is as harmful as too little.

So, if I'm right in my guess, the people of the Western world lost the balance between hard work and indulging in things that they never realized were harmful - smoking, for example, which was once considered a sign of sophistication and luxury. Drink, which gives a deceptive comfort and what is called 'a high'! The Mediterranean coast of Southern Europe became a symbol of glamour and gambling, where millionaires turned into beggars within a couple of hours, and every type of cheat, charlatan, and swindler made hay.

Worse was to come, in the form of hard drugs and perverse pleasures. It is a fact that drink, drugs and the intoxication of power, beauty and wealth make a person lose his mental balance, but I am baffled how even people who are highly educated, intelligent and aware of these things go ahead to their own ruin, and the ruin of loved ones. These toxic urges influence us, as we progress and prosper, and remind me of the episode in the Mahabharata when Yudhishtira's addiction to gambling made him stake his wife, Draupadi, and lost her to the wicked Duryodhan who wanted to disrobe her in public! What greater warning could there be against the evils of gambling; but which is the gambler who gives it a second thought?

Coming back to 'Breathe Smart', I feel we all need to think seriously about the wisdom of the leaders of countries like Iceland and Denmark, who are taking steps to reverse the damaging trends that threaten to destroy their people. We need to ponder on what we are doing to reverse negative trends. To say, 'what can one person do?' is to shirk the responsibility of every human being to resist wrong and have the courage to do right.

Thinking a bit more about this, a list of 'Smart' came to mind. We need to not only breathe smart (it is a fact that pranayama curtails negative impulses and improves health) but also to:

- Eat Smart

- Drink Smart
- Choose Smart
- Think Smart
- Plan smart
- Feel Smart
- Work Smart
- Enjoy Smart
- Read Smart
- And Set Smart Goals

And, I am convinced that everybody is 'smart' enough to know what I mean. Now it's up to you to choose what you want to be - 'Smart' or 'Stupid'!! It is an old adage that you can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink!

Purnima L. Toolsidass

26th June, '24

Rejection Therapy on Tiktok

I read the news on my computer every morning. We stopped newspapers during Covid, and then decided to continue to read news online and save paper as a small contribution to help the environment.

A headline in yesterday's CNN News caught my eye.

'Rejection Therapy in Tiktok'. Curious to know what this therapy is, I double clicked to open the article.

I am not a psychologist, so I cannot comment on things the experts promote, but I do wonder whether it actually helps people who are afraid of being rejected to approach strangers and ask for a loan of a hundred dollars..... I expect it does, else the therapy wouldn't be so popular; but for the life of me, I'd hate to try this idea.

To me, it makes more sense to have a 'Rejection Therapy' by forming a habit to reject the things that encourage emotional vulnerability instead of making us emotionally strong.

I think each of us understands enough about the working of the mind to know that positive thinking makes us happier and stronger; whereas negative thinking is detrimental to mental and physical health. Nasty comments and bad luck have little effect on us when we are happy, but make us feel wretched the day we feel a bit down.

Medical science has established the link between the mind and body. It is well known that depression, anxiety, the feeling of being unloved, of being a failure, or not being accepted by the society we live in, etc reduce immunity and make us more likely to fall ill. It also makes us more difficult to live with, thereby adding to the feeling of being rejected or unwanted.

I don't want to offend the pundits, but I'd go in for common sense any day! Anybody can see for themselves that gloomy people, people who

are touchy, bad tempered and prone to find fault are not welcome. Happy people, who are good tempered and tolerant, inclined to give compliments and encouragement are welcome everywhere.

So, it's obvious that a person who wants to be popular, loved, and welcomed, needs to develop the qualities that people appreciate. If they don't do this – if they develop the habits that nobody likes, how can they hope to be popular and accepted?

I challenge you to a little game. Try it for 10 days and I'll eat my hat if it doesn't work! (The fact that I don't have a hat is beside the point!) I have tried it and I know it works and I dare to challenge you on the basis of my experience. It costs nothing but the gain is considerable. Every morning, when you wake up but are too drowsy to get up, just linger in your bed for a while and think over what the day's program is likely to be. Every day has some nice things and some not-so-nice things. Make a promise to yourself. 'I am going to be happy today, no matter what happens to make me irritated. My happiness is important; why should I let the behaviour of other people take my happiness away? I will ignore all nasty comments and ignore the little irritations the day may bring. I will be happy and I will spread happiness.'

Then, at bedtime, go over the day. Did you keep your promise to yourself? Probably not; it's not so easy at first! Never mind; try again tomorrow. No athlete becomes a champion in one day. And, building up immunity for getting upset is to win a gold medal! Tell yourself more firmly the next day, and put a punishment clause for every time irritation rises. It can be as simple as doing some overdue task you've been avoiding. The punishment will help you both ways – you will get the work done and you will not want to invite another such task, so you'll hold on to mental equanimity instead of feeling hurt or getting upset!

Then, there is the negative effect of fear. I read somewhere about a famous person who quipped, when he was very old, that most of the things that worried him never happened. If he had his life to live again, he would spend it without worrying over possibilities. I felt that I'd like to do the same, because worry saps our strength and ability to be happy.

One more reason to be happy is that only a happy person can make others happy (unless he's a clown in a circus or a professional comedian at a night club). If we love our family and friends, and want them to be happy, we have to work on maintaining a good mood.

Now, to do that, we have to examine the things that spoil our mood. Usually they are petty things, forgotten the next day. People who get upset easily are generally weak minded. Their weakness is exposed by their tendency to get easily upset. If they are in a position of power, the people won't dare to show their lack of respect, but what we all want – powerful people and ordinary people – is to be respected by those we live and work with. And this respect comes automatically when others see how we remain calm in adverse situations, and this respect is reflected in their behaviour, giving us self-confidence and emotional security.

Now, don't you agree that this 'Rejection Therapy' of mine is easier to try than the daily asking a favour from a stranger?

Purnima L. Toolsidass

20th October, 2024.

A Visit to a Puja Pandal

‘Why do we have the Durga Puja every year, Ma?’ asked Piyali.

‘Because we invite her,’ said Shuma.

‘Why only her? Why not Shiva and Rama and Krishna?’

‘This is the tradition, Mamoni.’

‘It doesn’t seem logical, Ma. But I do like Ma Durga best!’

‘Yes, Sonamoni, so do I.’

‘I think the Devi has eighteen hands because women are better than multi-tasking!’ Piyali chatted on. At 12 she was full of ideas and an unexpected occasional wisdom beyond her age.

‘I agree fully! Men need a woman to look after them. They can be so impractical!’

‘Monika says men are more idealistic than women,’ Piyali chatted on as they walked back to their car.

‘I’m not sure about that, Piyali. It is a fact that male criminals outnumber women criminals, you know.’

‘Is that why the Asura is always a man?’ asked Piyali innocently.

‘Piyali, beta, you are old enough to know that this is symbolic,’ said her father.

‘How, Baba?’

‘The Devi represents the power of good; the Asura represents the power of evil. Evil is conquered by goodness,’ explained Hemant.

‘Oh!’ Piyali was digesting a new idea.

‘What exactly is evil, Baba?’ she asked after a few minutes of deep thought.

Shuma answered her. ‘To think, say, or do anything that harms or hurts any being is evil. We call it paapa, a sin. And, to be kind, to be compassionate, thoughtful, helpful and forgiving is goodness; it is punya, spiritual merit.’

‘Ma, is it true that people who do paapa go to Narak?’

Hemant felt that they were entering deep waters. He did not want Piyali to turn into a theologist! ‘Who knows who goes where? The main thing is to do good, and be good; not do bad things and be evil.’

‘But Baba,’ persisted Piyali, ‘so many things that are considered to be bad need to be done. For example, I have to smack Bhola when he chews up my sandals! Ma scolds Anima when she does not clean the floor properly. Isn’t it bad to smack a little puppy who doesn’t know that it is doing wrong, or scold a maid for being careless/ After all, we all do things that are wrong and are careless at times.’

‘So? Don’t you get scolded for them?’ asked Shuma with a smile.

‘Yes, but if the Asura does it, why does the Mother kill him? Why doesn’t she just scold?’

Hemant felt resigned. Piyali seemed to have a logical mind. He felt her questions deserved serious consideration and satisfying answers. He had seen so many children lose respect for their fathers, because their parents never responded seriously when they asked something seriously.

‘Piyali, an Asura is a symbol of evil. That means, the Asura causes people to suffer. The tendency to make others suffer has to be destroyed. It would be wonderful if people who were really nasty could be made to change, but that is an impossible dream. If we are nice to nasty people they think we are too weak to retaliate and they bully us more. That is their tendency, their nature. Ma Durga kills this tendency in a person who has become nasty. The Atma – the soul is immortal; it never dies. We believe it is reborn and given another chance to be good, and do good, and become good enough to merge into the Param-Atka, the Supreme. We ask Ma to come each year to make people realize that we need to remove the negative tendencies we have.’

‘But how will the Devi destroy the bad tendencies I have? Ma always tells me that I should not lose my temper, not tell lies, not feel greedy for rasagollas, and not be lazy!’

Shuma laughed, ‘Ogo, you will confuse the child!’ she said. ‘Piyali, Ma will help you, but only if you really want to overcome your flaws and try with all your heart. Nothing will happen unless you want to be a nicer girl!’

‘No! No! Ma! This is very interesting. I never knew about these things. Baba, is that why we celebrate Durga Puja – because we feel happy when good overcomes bad, and we becomes nicer and nicer?’

‘Ah! My little Piyali has got the right picture now! Come; let us go in and enjoy what Ma has cooked for us today!’

Thirty years later:

‘Ma, I find this Puja a big nuisance and a sham. I don’t believe in any Devi or Devta!’

‘Belief is personal, Babu,’ said Piyali. ‘Faith is not something you can measure with precision instruments.’

‘What makes you believe, Mummy?’

‘Well, for one thing, I don’t think any of us are cleverer or wiser than the sages of yore, or for that matter, Paramhansa Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and Shri Aurobindo and a hundred other saintly Mahatmas who have had supernatural experiences. Do you think they were all deluded fools?’

‘No; No one can say that!’

‘Well then, if you believe that these people lived, and that they had certain experiences and understanding about supernatural phenomenon, isn’t it rather arrogant to think that you know better?’

‘Ma! You hit hard! I don’t doubt that they believed what they said. But what is the proof that there is a divine power?’

‘Can you prove that you had a headache yesterday?’

‘How can you compare?’

‘Why not? It is a matter of faith or belief; not of validation by scientific proof.’

‘But faith in God leads to blind faith!’

‘Faith is blind, Beta! You believe in certain ideals like honesty, integrity, compassion, loyalty, etc. Is it not faith in them that makes you believe?’

Well.....yes! I suppose it is. But, the way people misuse religion puts me off!’

‘I agree completely, Babu. But to refuse to have faith in the qualities that nobody can deny are good is to invite everything that is bad. Faith in God, provided it is not distorted by personal weaknesses

helps us to hold on to our lofty values. Without such faith we would be like a rudderless ship.'

'But if there is a God, why does He allow so much evil and so much suffering, Ma?'

'I can only say what I believe, Shontu. The suffering is caused by our wrong actions in a previous life, because our Shastras say that there is rebirth until we get Moksha. It is a mathematical calculation that we suffer for having caused suffering.

As to why God allows suffering, my feeling is that this is the result of His giving us the freedom to choose our actions. Children in school are under a lot of discipline; both at school and at home. However, when they become adults they make their own decisions and face the consequences of their actions. It is like that. After all, even in a game there is a penalty if a player breaks the rules.'

'Oh, Ma! I feel confused. Maybe you're right; I don't know!'

'Think it out for yourself, Babu. Faith in goodness is what we all need, and faith in a divine power that is all-merciful and loving will help us live in peace, provided the so-called 'men of God' don't misuse it to mislead simple people and create fear and hatred among the people.'

Sixty years later:

'How did you enjoy your trip to Kolkata, Dad?' asked Bobby. 'Did you see many pandals?'

'Yes, son, ' said Shontu. 'You know, it's funny how I feel more deeply about the Pujas than I used to when I was your age.'

'Oh? Why's that?'

'Well, I was a bit of a disbeliever, you know.'

'Really, Dad? How did that change?'

'It was your grandmother's faith and her logical way of explaining religion. She knew how to brush aside the ritualistic part of it and explain the psychology.'

'Psychology – in the Puja celebrations?'

'Yes, Son. The way she reasoned, I was gradually convinced that the Vedic religion is applied psychology. It offers an option to people of

every type, inculcating idealism, giving faith in the eternal values, and offering consolation for misfortune.'

'But nobody believes in God any more, Dad!'

'That is a pity. If they believed in what God stands for, society would be more tolerant, less selfish and far less violent.'

'Come again?'

Shontu laughed. 'It's true, you know! Ritualism and strictures put people off. The preachers bore us with theology. They don't give simple, meaningful interpretations the way your grandmother did. She made everything sound so simple and logical, and convinced me of the benefits of having faith in an unseen power that can neither be proved nor disproved, but if understood correctly, can give us immense inner strength and courage,'

'Go on,' said Bobby, interested in spite of himself.

'Well, you see, Bobby, all beings suffer. Happiness and sorrow are both parts of life. Do you agree?'

'Yep!'

'A correct understanding of what I call spiritual psychology doesn't change the situation but it gives us a new perspective that enables us to deal with suffering and saves us from getting carried away by good fortune. It helps us to not succumb to jealousy, hatred, fear, lust or greed. It shows us how arrogance and callousness harms us and others. If we accept the law of Karma, we accept that our suffering is caused by our own misdeeds in a past birth and so we don't blame others bitterly, as people do when they don't accept the law of Karma. I believe in the law of Karma because I don't accept that God is whimsical or unjust, and this is the only logical explanation for all the inequities in the world.

I also believe that God – the Vedas also call it the Atma in all – sees our actions and the intention behind them, so even when something I do or say is misunderstood, I don't get very upset. It hurts, of course, but there is the comfort of knowing that there is someone who loves me and understands. It is this same feeling that steadies me when I start feeling lonely or afraid. And let me tell you, that's a great thing!'

‘Yeah, Dad. I get you. I want to go and write this down so when I grow up and get married, I can explain all this to my children. I also want to think about it for myself. I wish I’d know my grandmother – but in a way, I feel I do know her, because of the way you talk about her. She must have been a great woman!’
‘That she was! She was the best Mom I could have had!’ said Shontu.

Purnima L. Toolsidass
9th October, 2024